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Convenience stores and well-being of young Japanese consumers.

Introduction

*"Over a day, a **konbini** witnesses all age groups and occupations and serves all families. Many young customers have never lived without them and others find it hard to remember what life was like without themthese shops push the notion of "convenience" beyond our wildest ideas of basic needs: they provide fresh (high-quality, not fast-food) packaged meals, every notion and need of a household from laundry detergent to whiskey, ties, underwear, and cameras, school and office supplies, a drop-off point for parcel delivery services, a bill payment site for utilities and other regular services, gift and floral ordering service, copy and fax facilities, and more" (White 2002: 196-197).*

The ubiquitous convenience store, or konbini, has a broad appeal and is an integral part of the Japanese landscape and everyday life. While the demographic shift to an ageing Japan is undeniable the 'konbini' remains an important 'shopping habitat' for young consumers providing them with the opportunity to exercise some discretionary consumption and make choices independent of direct parental influence (Usui 2014, Marshall 2016, Elliott 2012, Marshall et. al. 2007). These uniquely Japanese stores stock a wide range of everyday goods that ultimately affect what is available in each locale, stocking regional items, seasonal products and providing a constant stream of new products. Moreover, the place and space elements provided by the internal layout, design and ambience of individual stores arguably contribute to the retail well-being and customer experience. This paper, building on earlier research, considers the role of the konbini as part of young consumer's food environment and examines the link between the retail environment, the consumer experience and well-being. The aim of the research is to investigate young Japanese consumer's shopping behaviour and experiences of the konbini. It is primarily descriptive but aims to address the relative lack of information on this retail format and to provide a foundation for subsequent work on the interdependency of physical and social well-being in retailing and changing dynamics in the use of the konbini. It looks at store patronage and factors that are considered important in the decision to use this retail format now and in the future (see Blut et. al. 2018 for a recent review). The paper begins by looking at the relationship between the food retail environment and health as well as considering broader aspects of shopper well-being. It discusses the rise of the convenience sector in Japan and, through analysis of survey data, reflects on the role that the convenience store plays in the lives of young consumers, over 18 years old.

Well-Being and the convenience store.

Concern about an increasingly 'obesogenic' environment has raised questions about the role of food retailers in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly regarding the availability of less healthful choices (Howlett et. al. 2016, Ruff et. al., 2015, Walker et. al. 2014, Dawson, 2013, Shier et. al., 2012, Lake et. al., 2011; Lake et. al.

2011, Mukarami 2009, Powell et. al. 2007). The range and type of retail food provision across different store formats has a direct impact on the affordability of a healthy diet (Howlett et. al. 2016, Iwama et. al. 2016, Smith et. al 2010, Dawson et. al. 2008). However, convenience stores with their assortment of less healthy foods, including sweets, snacks, cookies, pastries and sweetened drinks, are usually associated with poorer quality diet. Moreover, adolescents living near to convenience stores are likely to purchase food from those outlets when a parent or guardian is not around (He et. al. 2012, Lind 2016, Sanders-Jackson et. al. 2015, Sharkey et. al., 2012; Sharkey et. al., 2013, Gebauer and Lasaka 2011, Powell et. al. 2007). As frequent users of these outlets, young consumers are often attracted by low prices, discounts, wide variety and service (Wills. et. al. 2015, Grigsby-Toussaint 2011).

As previous research has shown, the choice of retail grocery store format depends on a series of factors that include location, product assortment, product quality, price, store brands and service with different store attributes and demographics influencing format choice (Blut et. al. 2018, Prasad and Aryasri 2009, Pan and Zinkhan 2006, Carpenter and Moore 2006, Seiders and Tigert 2000, Hansen and Solaard 2004, Baltas and Papastahopoulou 2003). In a meta-analysis of retail marketing mix effects on patronage Blut et. al. (2018) provide an insight into the effectiveness of key instruments including product, service, brands, incentives, communication, price and distribution instruments. They note that in utilitarian shopping contexts customers appreciate incentives, proximity to home/work and spatial distance to ensure faster shopping with frequent visitors to retail formats relying on past experiences. Furthermore, store format choice depends on the nature of the shopping trip and whether it is a main/bulk or a top up/fill-in shopping trip (Prasad and Aryasri 2011, Reutterer and Teller 2009). However, researchers have challenged the belief that consumers only use supermarkets for main shopping and convenience stores for top up shopping, arguing for a need to better understand consumer patronage motives (Nilsson et. al. 2015). Part of the appeal of small shops lies in the ability to save time because of their proximity; this includes two material dimensions of access proximity, notably, when the store is permanently or temporarily close to home, and functional proximity regarding convenience and shopping efficiency. In addition, three immaterial dimensions relate to relational proximity or social relationships, identity proximity or shared values and process proximity referring to the manufacturing and distribution process (Bergadaà and Del Bucchia 2009 in Gahinet and Cliquet 2018). In the case of French customers relational and functional proximity are the main reasons for patronising convenience stores allowing them to both save time (*chronos*) and manage their time (*kairos*) (Gahinet and Cliquet 2018). But how does this relate to well-being?

Dodge et. al. (2012) define well-being as the balance between life events and challenges that include psychological, social and physical resources. While there is a diversity of definitions around well-being, the idea of happiness features prominently (Diener et. al. 1999, Ben-Arieh et. al. 2014, Hérmès-Nicolas 2017). As part of retail well-being customer satisfaction with the shopping experience can lead to enhanced store loyalty and positive word of mouth (Grzeskowiak et. al 2016, El Hedhli et. al. 2013, Wagner 2007). The type and quality of the products on offer can contribute to well-being but there has been a shift away from 'food as health' to

‘food as well-being’ that opens up the concept to include food socialisation, food literacy, food marketing, food availability and food policy (Block et. al. 2011). Children’s food well-being centres on notions of pleasure, commensality, empowerment, kindness and health and as Hérmar Nicols and Ezan (2017) note ‘Retailers increasingly engage in improving people’s life by valuing health, responsible consumption, sustainability and finally consumer’s wellbeing as a whole’ (page 2). As they acknowledge much of the focus on children’s well-being has centred on health and nutrition with limited consideration for the way in which food consumption contributes to well-being in everyday life and more broadly impacts at a social and emotional level (see Roberts and Pettigrew 2013) . They go on to make the link between retail provision and well-being and argue that retailers are uniquely positioned to manage the tension between nutritional well-being and pleasure through their own label innovation (Hérmar Nicols and Ezan 2017). However, shifting the focus to higher levels of satisfaction requires us to consider overall happiness and include cumulative retail experiences that affect consumer, social, leisure and community life (El Hedhli et. al. 2016, Sirgy et. al. 2007). In this respect, the focus shifts from the food to the broader retail experience and there is an argument that shopping well-being, in and of itself, contributes to personal quality of life or life satisfaction; and may be one way to attract shoppers particularly in competitive and mature marketplaces. In the case of individual stores, this can include utilitarian factors (e.g. functionality, convenience, safety) and hedonic factors (e.g., leisure, atmospherics, self-identification) (El Hedhli et. al. 2013). Moreover, emotional aspects of grocery shopping such as pleasure derived from shopping and functional aspects such as accessing healthy foods and quality products can contribute to overall food well-being (Guillemin et. al. 2016). Recent evidence suggests hedonic rather than utilitarian values drive shopping well-being with enjoyable shopping experiences (hedonic value) leading to a sense of well-being (El Hedhli et. al 2016). However, most of this research centres on North American or European consumers. The paper now turns to consider the Japanese konbini.

Japanese Konbini

Traditional Japanese convenience stores (*nihon-gata*) sold perishable foods such as meat, fish, fruit and vegetables (Nagata 1972). Many of these stores were part of voluntary chains associated with wholesalers such as K Mart (sponsored by sweets wholesaler, Kittaka in Osaka), Sun Mart (sponsored by food wholesaler Marusei, in Kobe) and Seiko Mart (sponsored by Nishio, a liquor wholesaler in Hokkaido) or retailer co-operatives like Myshop Chain (Usui 2014: 181). The growth of the convenience sector, or konbini, is attributed to the interest shown by the ‘*supers*’, or general ‘supers’, following the Large-scale Retail Store Law (1974-2000) that restricted store trading hours, expansion and new store openings for premises >1500m² (Usui 2014: 184). The origins of the Japanese konbini can be traced back to the mid-seventies and Ito Yokado who brought Seven-Eleven to Japan in 1973; trading under licence as a wholly owned subsidiary of the American company. Two years later Daiei developed their Lawson stores through an agreement with the Lawson Milk Company, and Seiyu entered the market with Family Mart in 1977. The number of convenience stores, <500m² trading area¹, grew rapidly, through franchise arrangements and currently there are over 56,000

stores representing just under 20% of the total food sales with a market value of 10.2 trillion yen. Seven-Eleven, Lawson and Family Mart Unyⁱⁱ currently dominate the convenience sector.

Konbini, unlike the traditional (nihon-gata) stores, sell mainly premade and simply packaged food. They stock around 2-3000 items including snacks, sweets, instant ramen, rice balls, lunchboxes (bento), and hot foods ready-to-go like fried chicken, nikum and oden, as well as beverages, magazines, toiletries and basic household goods (Whitelaw 2016, Kodera 2015, Japan.com 2015, Usui 2014, Bestor 2006). As Bestor observes

'In my own informal surveys of the shelves of konbini, I have noted they rarely stock many foodstuffs that would qualify as "ingredients": things out of which one could construct another dish. There is milk, cheese, butter, eggs, tofu, miso paste, maybe a potato, an onion, a carrot, an orange, or a banana (each individually wrapped in plastic), salt, pepper, and sugar, but rarely any other vegetables, fruits, let alone fresh fish, meat, or poultry. Konbini food is off the rack' (2006: 125).

Konbini remain popular with young consumers and commuters with their much broader appeal as 'lifestyle' centres for 'young mobile, free-spending Japanese consumers'. Product innovation is key to their success with stores developing bread and pastries, expanding *soazi* prepared meals, chilled ranges, fresh products and freshly brewed coffee (Seven-Eleven Annual Report, 2015; Lin et. al. 2013). Ventures into the area of fresh produce have proved less successful (Japan Consuming 2016) although seasonal and local foods remain important (Noguchi 1994). Long opening hours, clear corporate and product branding, shopper anonymity and an increasing range of services that includes selling computer software, copying and fax services, banking and financial transaction services, collection and delivery services, travel and telephone cards and tickets, as well as home delivery services 'takkyūbin' underpin their success (Bestor 2006: 122/123).

Japanese consumers prefer frequent shopping trips; using a variety of outlets with a focus on freshness and quality and 'top-up' shopping allows residents to shop quickly, often and close to home without needing to use a car (Haddock-Fraser et. al. 2009, Bestor 2006). In metropolitan areas of Japan the dense location strategy (*shuchu shutten senryaku*) adopted by the major operators and proliferation of convenience stores means that young consumers have easy access to these stores on their way to and from school or college as part of their everyday retail practice (Marshall 2016, Usui 2014). Konbini are not necessarily competing with fast food outlets, although they do sell hot ready to eat foods, and there are clear lines of demarcation between what is Western and what is Japanese fast food (ekiben), with the latter often associated with healthier, less processed items (Noguchi 1994). This is probably best exemplified by the *onigiri* or rice ball, a traditional Japanese food that has become the best-selling, iconic, konbini food and allowed the convenience store to 'insert itself between the reproduction of family and the production of the market economy (White 2002)' (Whitelaw 2006: 142). Main criticisms of the konbini centre on the impersonal nature of consumption, the homogenization of foodways and the disappearance of local foodstuffs that lead to an increasing alienation of young consumers from Japanese cuisine (Bestor 2006, Iwanmura 2014). Eating out remains popular in Asia

(Veeck 2014) but given the appeal of the convenience store to Japan's young consumers (Usui 2014) what are the implications for well-being?

Method

The aim of this research is to investigate young Japanese consumer's food shopping behaviour and experiences of the konbini to get a clearer picture of how they use these stores. The paper builds on earlier work looking at young consumer's discretionary consumption in the konbini (Marshall 2016) and draws on research looking at Japanese food shoppers (Haddock-Fraser et. al. 2009). The study is based on a purposeful sample of young consumers (18 years and older) recruited across several Japanese universities and using an on-line survey (n=453) collected using Qualtrics Experience Management Programme®. Specific questions ask about store patronage, factors considered important in the decision to use the convenience store, how stores could increase their appeal to young consumers and retail well-being. The questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Japanese by native Japanese speakers, and back translated to check for consistency and accuracy between the two versions. The survey was piloted in Japan in 2016 (n=33) and then developed and refined for an on-line version in 2017. Revisions included additional questions on well-being and refinement of some of the food shopping questions. The survey could be completed on a desktop, laptop or mobile phone and respondents had up to two weeks to complete the surveyⁱⁱⁱ. The Qualtrics® programme generated a web link to the questionnaire and this was distributed to university students with the assistance of Japanese colleagues. Young consumers were recruited as they are more likely to have some financial independence and use these stores on their way to and from college or work and, they were easier to access than younger children^{iv}. The University Business School ethics committee approved the research proposal. All responses were voluntary and anonymous and respondents had the right to withdraw at any stage in the data collection. The data reported here were collected between 1 May -23 May 2017. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 21.

Findings

This analysis is based on 453 completed surveys. Thirty surveys were excluded due to incomplete or missing data. Most respondents were aged between 18-20 years old (80%), with marginally more women (54%) than men (46%) completing the survey. Most were in full time education but working part time (68%) with a number in full time education but not working (29%). The remainder were working full time with a small number involved in part time education. Around two thirds of respondents were living with their family (65%), the rest lived alone (31%), or shared accommodation with friends or lived in student dormitories. Responses were predominantly from the Kanto region mainly Tokyo (49%) and Saitama (20%) with some representation from the Kansai region mainly Osaka (11%). This section looks at food purchases, factors influencing store choice and the contribution of the store to well-being. Both descriptive statistics and cross tabulation analysis

is used to examine patterns of shopping and key attributes of the store and wellbeing are identified using factor analysis.

Everyday purchases

INSERT Figure 1 ABOUT HERE

When asked about their frequency of food purchasing (Figure 1) most respondents (20-40%) report buying different types of food product once a week. Snacks and confectionary (39% of respondents), fresh food (38%), perishable processed food (tofu, chilled food) (29%) and bento (lunchboxes) (24%) are bought almost every day or several times a week. Close to one quarter of respondents reported never buying food products, with those who live at home tending not to buy fresh and processed food; most probably because their parents (mother) buys these products. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the frequency of snack and confectionary purchases for those living alone or at home suggesting that this remains one of the most frequently purchased food groups for these young consumers.

Respondents reported using a variety of store formats and the type of food purchased varied by format. The majority buy fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and dairy (around 75%) at the general supermarket or food supermarket along with noodles (65%) and processed foods (60%) and rice (55%). The konbini was primarily used to purchase noodles and dairy products. Many respondents did not normally buy rice (40% of respondents) or other main food groups such as fish, meat or fruit and vegetables (18-25%).

When asked specifically about shopping at the konbini purchases centre mainly on food and drinks. Green tea and other tea products are most popular drinks (30% of responses) followed by water (17%), with coffee (including in store fresh coffee) (16%), carbonated soft drinks (14%), fruit juice (10%) and relatively few purchases of alcohol (4%). Onigiri (rice balls) are the most popular food (68% of respondents) followed by breads and pastries (60%) then sweets and chocolate (53%). Takeaway foods (salad, sandwich), hot snacks and confectionary (40% for each category) are popular followed by snacks (35%). Almost no fresh food (2%) is bought from the konbini reflecting the association of the convenience store with more processed food items. While magazine purchases were relatively low (8%) respondents reported using other services ATM etc. (39%).

The majority of respondents shop alone (78%) or with friends (18%) very few report visiting the konbini with their family, despite the fact that most live at home. Seven Eleven (50%) is the most popular operator, reflecting the dominance of this retailer in the sector, followed by Family Mart (24%) and Lawson (17.4%). Visits to the konbini averaged 2-3 times per week (40%) with around one third of respondents (27%) visiting a konbini 4-5 times per week. Just over one tenth (12%) are frequent users, visiting every day. These visits are spread equally across the day with the afternoon and evening marginally more popular than morning or

lunchtime. Average spend is 201-400 yen^v (40%) or higher 401-600 yen (30%). A chi squared test was performed and found a relationship between residence and expenditure; respondents living with their family spend less on average per visit than those living alone; 45% compared to 33% respectively spend ¥201-400 per visit and 10% compared to 19% respectively spend ¥601-800 per visit (χ^2 (4, N=425) = 12.19, p=0.016).

The appeal of the konbini

INSERT Figure 2 ABOUT HERE

Location is a key factor in the decision to use the convenience store with proximity to work/school/college public transport and home (94%) the most important criteria in choosing a konbini (Figure 2). The attraction of long opening hours (87%), a wide product range (83%) and low prices (78%) are all important, or very important, to these consumers. The focus on prices is interesting as konbini are not the cheapest places to grocery shop. Quality of products (69%) is also important as is the shopping environment (67%), including good service (63%). Increasingly stores are looking to attract customers and new product (60%) and loyalty (points) programmes are all rated as important considerations. Easy access by car and contribution to public welfare are not important for the konbini nor is the store layout relative to other factors which highlights the different consumer expectations for this type of store format (Haddock-Fraser et. al. 2009). The appeal of private brands and national (manufacturer) brands is mixed. There was little difference in rating across gender although further analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between gender for the importance of store location close to transport determined by one-way ANOVA ((F1,448) = 7.11, p= .001) with females rating this a more important (mean = 1.47) than males (mean=1.72). Those in full time education not working gave the location of the store close to home (mean = 1.28) and contribution to public welfare (mean = 2.87) more importance than those who were in full time education but working part time (mean = 1.41 and mean = 3.10 respectively), ANOVA ((F1, 425) = 12.19, p=0.016). Factor analysis, varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, yielded four factors explaining 58.33% of the variance. Factor 1 relates to store environment due to the high loadings on the physical layout and service and convenience. This factor explained 34.68% of the variance. Factor 2, brand loyalty and innovation, reflects the high loading on private and national brands and the loyalty (points) programme, explaining 10.49% of the variance. Factor 3 is associated with store location and proximity to university, school and work. Factor 4, price, reflects the focus on low price and bargain offers in store. These attributes are similar to those identified in other studies (Carpenter and Moore 2006, Hansen and Solaard 2004, Baltas and Papastahopoulou 2003) although wide product range (product assortment) and the service component is included as part of the store environment rather than as a separate factor. Despite the overall importance attached to location the store environment explains a high degree of the variance in the model.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Perhaps unsurprisingly, reduced prices (93%), student discounts (94%) and opening a store on campus (92%), despite the abundance of konbini in many cities, are all considered as an important way to attract young consumers. However, reduced packaging (88%), new product development (86%) and improved speed at checkout (80%) are all highly rated. The addition of healthier products (78%) is appealing although retailing fresh foods (39%) through the konbini is much less important and the majority seem happy with maintaining the status quo.

'Well-konbeing'

INSERT Figure 3 ABOUT HERE

There is some agreement (Figure 3) with the idea that shopping at the konbini contributes to overall quality of life, satisfying food needs and contributing to both social well-being and community well-being (these statements did not evoke any disagreement). Most respondents enjoyed shopping at the konbini and neither agreed nor disagreed that shopping at the konbini had a negative impact on their health. Females were more likely to try and buy healthy food at the konbini (mean score 3.25) compared to males (mean score 3.86), ANOVA ((F1,447) = 13.61, P=.000; to use it for top up shopping (mean score 3.09) compared to males (mean score 3.52), ANOVA (F1, 447) = 2.26, p=.009; and are more likely to enjoy shopping at the convenience store (female mean = 2.84, male mean score 3.21, ANOVA (F1, 447) = 15.56, P= .009) . While shopping at the konbini satisfies the food shopping needs of respondents living as part of a family those living alone rated it lower on this dimension (living with family mean 2.87, living alone mean 3.13, ANOVA (F1, 438) = 4.27, p=.039). Those in full time education and not working were less likely to agree that the konbini contributed to their social well-being (mean score = 3.08) compared to those in full time education and working part time (mean score 2.90), ANOVA (F1, 440) =5.88, p=.016).

Average well-being mean score was calculated^{vi} based on 6 items (overall QOL; satisfying needs; social well-being; community well-being; feeling good; enjoyment) and analysis showed no statistically significant difference in mean wellbeing scores by gender, education status, household, time of visit to the convenience store. However, analysis of regular visits revealed a statistically significant difference between groups determined by one-way ANOVA ((F3,449) = 7.279, p=.000). A tukey post hoc test revealed a statistically significant difference between those visiting the konbini once a week or less (mean well-being score 3.45 ± 1.1) and those visiting 2-3 times per week ($3.08 \pm .99$), 4-5 times per week (2.9 ± 1.0) or every day or more frequently (3.0 ± 1.1).

Discussion

This survey of young Japanese consumers provides an insight into the appeal of the konbini format. As an integral part of the urban food environment, the konbini represents a very different type of retail format to the traditional *nihon gata*, the ‘mom and pop’ store of the past, the corner shop or c-store found in North America or Europe. The appeal of the konbini lies as much in the physical location and close proximity to where young people study or work or travel^{vii}. In many ways these are as much ‘convenient’ as ‘convenience’ stores and a normal part of everyday shopping experiences of these young consumers (see Halkier 2017). The attraction of the store format lies in the ability to cater for this group of consumers and provide access, across the day, to a range of products confirming the importance of market and product related factors (Blut et. al. 2018, Pan and Zinkhan 2006) and the need for access and functional proximity (Gahinet and Cliquet 2018, Bergadaà and Del Bucchia 2009). Konbini clearly cater to the utilitarian shopper (Blut et. al. 2018) but good service and staff along with incessant new product development and innovation adds a hedonic dimension and contributes to the relatively positive experience of shopping at this retail format. While lower prices would make the stores more attractive the relative spend is low and orientated towards sustenance centred on ‘grazing’ rather than providing fresh foods or meal ingredients (supermarkets and general food stores cater to these needs). The fact that a high proportion of the respondents still live with their family, a quarter claim not to regularly purchase main food items, suggests that the konbini is more relevant to their food shopping needs. However, while good staff and service are rated as important and improved speed at checkout has some appeal unlike traditional family grocers building personal relationships with konbini staff, and relational proximity, seems less important^{viii} for these young consumers compared to other studies (Gahinet and Cliquet 2018, Blut et. al. 2018, Srichookiat and Jindabot 2017, Heider and Moeller 2012,).

The idea of the convenience store as being good or bad for health, and well-being, may be over simplistic and fails to capture the broader role of the konbini in relation to young Japanese consumer’s retail experience and everyday life. In Japan, at least, while many of the food products in the konbini are classed as less healthy there are also healthy options and the survey responses show that while snacks and confectionary remain popular so too do healthier options like onigiri (rice balls) and bread products. Although health is not a main attraction of the convenience store many of the young consumers are interested in healthier products and continue to seek new innovative products on the shelves; although this remains a challenge for the sector (Japan Consuming 2015). In Japanese culture, fast foods or snacks are not necessarily seen as substitutes for the family meal and we should see the frequent use of these stores in the broader context of food shopping. Konbini are an important part of these young consumers food shopping experience, look at the frequency with which they are used, and in this respect contribute towards their general well-being (El Heidhli et. al. 2016). It may be because these retail spaces are a better fit with their everyday food practices – ‘grazing’, snacking and top up shopping – and offer an environment where they are more comfortable. These outlets cater to their needs (Haddock-Fraser 2009, Bestor 2006). The contribution to well-being lies in the store accessibility and appropriateness (this may be less so for other groups such as the elderly or those living alone if they are reliant on the konbini for all their needs, see Iwama et. al. 2016). The informality of the konbini, the familiarity with

the store environment, the opportunity to test goods (instant gratification), and the ability to save and manage time all contribute to overall satisfaction among young consumers with this type of format (Hérmar-Nicolas and Ezan 2017, Marshall 2016, Boulay et. al. 2014, Williams and Burns 2001, Zimmerman 1992). These small shops provide an opportunity for some autonomy and independence from parents as part of young consumer's socialisation (Everts and Jackson 2009, Marshall 2016, Ward et. al. 1977).

Conclusion

This research provides a snapshot of one group of young Japanese consumer's and an insight into one aspect of their food shopping practices. These remain formative years in terms of gaining some independence from home and while many children still accompany their parents when shopping for food (Marshall et. al. 2007, Marshall 2014, Gram 2014) young consumers are still only 'partially' engaged in food shopping as many transition between home life and more independent living. In looking at the appeal of the konbini we can begin to understand how this contributes to well-being among young Japanese consumers. While the sample is drawn mainly from students, many of who are working part time, we cannot generalise but the appeal of the konbini format goes beyond the provision of products and services to include elements of the shopping experience that contribute to general well-being by providing an environment that meets their shopping needs from both a functional and a hedonic perspective. (Hérmar-Nicolas and Ezan 2017). Konbini offer a 'freedom from intimacy' that is not permitted in more traditional convenience stores or other food retail emporiums (Wilk et. al 2006, Bestor 2006, Whitelaw 2006) and these remain important sites for discretionary consumption (Marshall et. al. 2007). While young consumers may no longer be the key demographic target for the konbini this retail format remains a key part of their food socialization and everyday food practice (Usui 2014, White 2002). The high proportion of respondents shopping alone is surprising and raises questions about the involvement of friends and the socialisation around the konbini; although there is evidence of this elsewhere (Marshall 2016). Young consumers generally enjoy shopping in the convenience store and continue to do so on a regular basis. It is the ubiquity and general appeal of the konbini, with an increasing diversity of innovative products and services that provide the potential to connect with young consumers and, in the process, adds to their sense of well-being by continuing to be convenient place to shop. On a practical note, retailers might recognise the role of the konbini in the everyday food practices of young consumers and the potential contribution to their general well-being that goes beyond the provision of healthy food. However, as well as contributing to subjective well-being these outlets may have a role to play in introducing young consumers to not only convenient but healthier, tastier and a more diverse range of foods. New products appeal to these customers and offering healthier items, or promoting Japanese snack foods that are less processed, has the potential to influence what young consumers are consuming. This is the point where retailers have a part to play in food well-being (Hérmar-Nicols and Ezan 2017, de Faultrier 2016). Konbini must continue to innovate to attract young consumers while acknowledging the implications of their stocking policy on consumer well-being. At present, few of these young consumers see their patronage of the konbini as having a negative impact on their health but the contribution to general well-being may have more to do with

the overall shopping experience and the independence, autonomy and freedom it affords them as consumers. The retail contribution to the social aspect of well-being is something that might be addressed in further studies.

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ⁱ Most were around 1-200m²

ⁱⁱ Family Mart merged with Uny Holdings, owners of 6250 Circle K Sunkus stores, in September 2016. This makes is second largest convenience store operator behind Seven-Eleven
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/01/business/corporate-business/merger-familymart-uny-creates-japans-no-2-convenience-store-chain/#.WNOmvlXXJzo> (accessed 24/04/18)

ⁱⁱⁱ An anti-ballot option in Qualtrics © meant each respondent could only complete the survey once.

^{iv} While accessing younger children would have been ideal this would have required access to schools and teachers as well as additional ethical approval.

^v One British pound is worth around 142 yen, one US Dollar is worth 111 Japanese yen (28th May 2017)

^{vi} A reliability analysis was carried out on the well-being scale comprising 9 items. Cronbacha Alpha showed an acceptable reliability of α 0.806. Removal of items relating to buying healthy food at the konbini, and top up shopping increased the alpha to α = 0.820.

^{vii} As Blut et. al. (2018: 129) note access to the store is important for food retailers given the exhaustive nature of food shopping and the characteristics of food products.

^{viii} One reason may be the association of convenience goods with minimal shopping effort (Pan and Zinkhan 2006).

Figure 1: Food shopping frequency by food type (n=453)

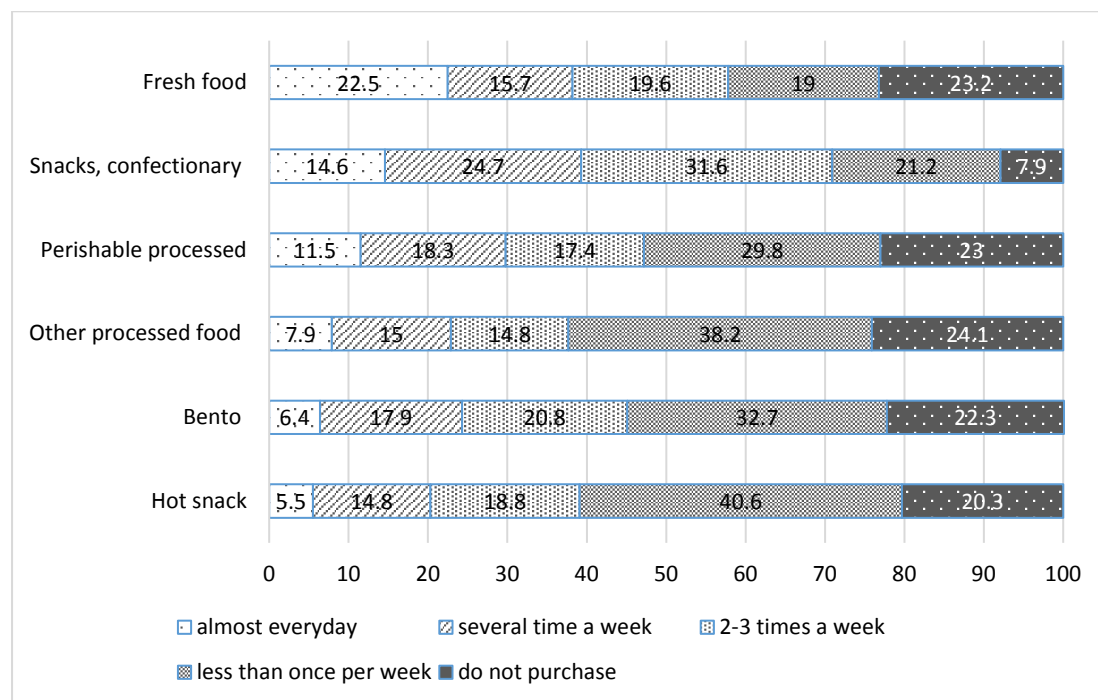


Figure 2: Important factors when visiting the konbini (n=453)

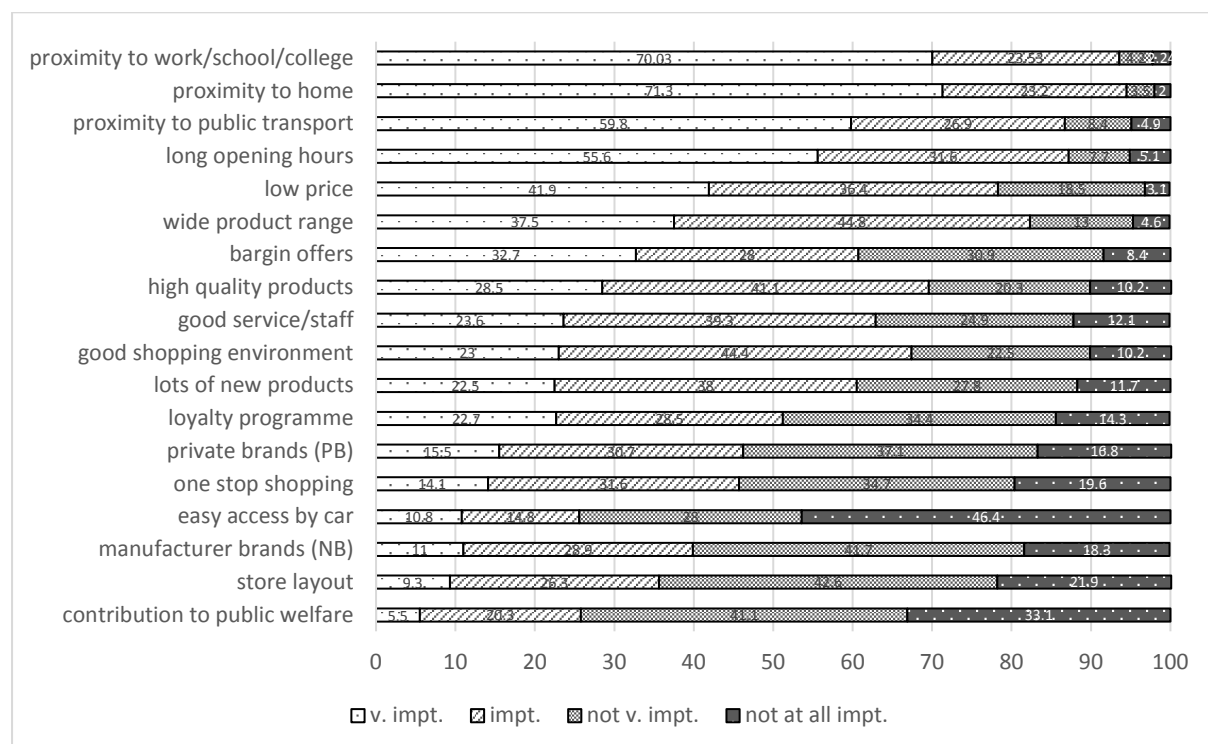


Figure 3: Well being, health and the konbini (n=453)



1= strongly agree, 4= neither, 7= strongly disagree

Table 1: Factors relating to Konbini choice among young consumers. Store factor analysis

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Store layout	.712			
Good shopping environment	.702			
Good quality service, staff	.650			
One stop shopping	.644			
Wide product range	.636			
Contribution to public welfare	.571			
High quality products	.548			
Easy to drive to	.537			
Private brand (PB) products etc.		.794		
National brand (NB) products etc.	.419	.760		
Loyalty programme (points)		.622		.402
Many new products	.435	.554		
Close to university, school, work			.800	
Close to station, bus stop			.755	
Long opening hours			.663	
Close to home			.613	
Low price				.849
Bargain offers				.762

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.